

First Baptist Church

ORGANIZED 1809



239 MIDDLE STREET

NEW BERN, N. C.

FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

*Faith of our fathers, living still
In spite of dungeon, fire and sword,
O how our hearts beat high with joy,
Whene'er we hear that glorious word.
Faith of our fathers, holy faith,
We will be true to thee till death.*

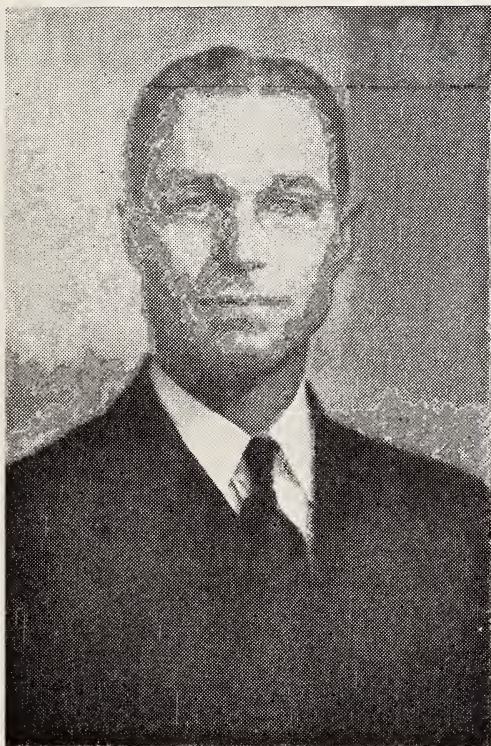
*Faith of our fathers, faith and prayer
Have kept our country brave and free
And through the truth that comes from God,
Her children have true liberty!
Faith of our fathers, holy faith,
We will be true to thee till death.*

*Faith of our fathers, we will love
Both friend and foe in all our strife;
And preach thee, too, as love knows how,
By kindly words and virtuous life.
Faith of our fathers, holy faith,
We will be true to thee till death.*

—FREDERICK W. FABER, 1849.

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OUR PASTOR



REV. CHARLES E. PARKER

CHURCH STAFF

- CHARLES E. PARKER *Pastor*
- DONALD SMITH *Minister of Music*
- MRS. ANDREW FULLER *Organist*
- W. K. RUSSELL *Church Clerk*
- MRS. MARCUS EDWARDS *Church Secretary*
- LOUIS DANIEL *Chm. Board of Deacons*

A CENTURY AND A HALF OF SERVICE

The First Baptist Church of New Bern, since its organization on May 11, 1809, by Elijah Clark, John Brinson and Mrs. Joshua Mitchell, has an outstanding record of a century and a half of service and growth, with exceptionally worthy accomplishments for religion, Christian education and community betterment of which every member today may be justifiably proud.

Founders of the congregation were not the first Baptists in this area. Paul Palmer, eminent Baptist minister, who came here from the Chowan region during the early thirties of the 18th century, was one of the first denominational leaders to visit the town. He found several Baptists here and advised them to start a church.

James Brinson, William Fulcher and Nicholas Purifoy asked for permission to build a church in New Bern during the following decade. Their request was refused and they were charged with misdemeanors, publicly whipped, bound over to keep the peace, and imprisoned for three months in the county jail.

Benjamin Miller and Peter Peterson Van Horn missionaries of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, held services here during the period of 1755-57. George Whitefield, world-famed evangelist, paid a third visit here in 1765 and warned the people against the rejection of infant baptism.

Before the 19th century a number of Baptist churches flourished in the vicinity: Swift Creek, twelve miles northwest of New Bern, first

organized by William Burges of Pasquotank and reorganized by Miller and Van Horn with Joseph Willis as pastor in 1756; New River in Onslow County, started in 1759; Trent River in Jones County, organized in 1761; Southwest in Lenoir County, formed in 1762; Newport River in Carteret County, organized in 1778; Goose Creek, started in 1784; and Coor (Core) Creek, organized in 1791.

Two of the most prominent Baptists of the section during those early days were members of the Trent River Church: Col. Nathan P. Bryan, State and National Representative, moderator of Kehukee Association and chief organizer of Neuse Association with 23 churches in 1793; and Sheriff John Dillahunty of Craven County, who was first aroused spiritually by Whitefield's sermons, converted at a meeting held by Shubael Stearns and Daniel Marshall of the Sandy Creek Association, and baptized by Philip Mulky, then became pastor of his home church and later took over an entire Episcopal church and congregation.

During the Spring of 1809, in a front room at the home of Elijah Clark at the Junction of Craven and Middle Streets, the local Baptist church was started by Clark, John Brinson and Mrs. Joshua (Mary Willis) Mitchell. Services were conducted in various houses of the town until a church could be erected.

Brinson agreed to furnish the lumber for a Baptist meeting house from the woodlands on his plantation on the north side of Neuse River ten miles below New Bern. Clark promised to have it sawed and to try to procure the necessary money for construction purposes.

Zacchaeus Slade, a nephew of Brinson, then only a lad but later for forty years an honored deacon of the church, assisted in driving the teams that hauled the logs to the banks of the Neuse River to be floated to the city. Near the river here an enormous pit was dug for the sawing and planing of the rough logs.

The simple, frame structure, built plainly without a steeple, faced on Johnson Street, with a 36-foot frontage, and extended back 40 feet on Metcalf Street. From floor to ceiling it was 22 feet. By the Summer of 1811, with most of the work done by volunteers, it was ready for use. Improvements were added later.

No regular pastor was engaged at the outset, but John "Daddy" McCabe served from time to time, and tradition says that his body was buried under the church pulpit. The first pastor was probably the Rev. William P. Biddle, born in 1787 in Princess Anne County, Va., who came to North Carolina as an itinerant preacher and in 1810 married Mary Nixon Simpson, the only surviving child of Gen. Samuel Simpson, a wealthy Baptist layman who resided at Fort Barnwell. Of Biddle it has been written: "Being a man of large wealth he preached gratuitously. He was eminent for a devout spirit, a godly walk, and a large measure of influence."

Before the Presbyterians built their house of worship here, 1819-22, they often used the Baptist church. In 1818 a local Presbyterian poet, Stephen M. Chester, wrote humorously of the edifice:

*“The Baptist barn comes next to view
Where winter winds turn noses blue,
And shivering devotees retire
Right glad from worship to the fire;
But Presbyterians in the lurch,
Too poor or mean to build a church,
Are glad to find admittance here
When its own priests don't interfere.”*

The First Baptist pastor for whom there is an authentic record was the Rev. Thomas Meredith, who served as part-time pastor from July, 1819, to March, 1822, and afterwards from July, 1834, to the Autumn of 1836. It was here on January 5, 1835, that he started “The Biblical Recorder.” For him is named Meredith College at Raleigh.

Of the 25 pastors who served here before the 20th century, many were prominently connected with the foundation work of North Carolina Baptist organizations. When the Baptist State Convention was formed March 26, 1830, the church constitution was presented by Meredith. Biddle was elected First Vice President. John Armstrong, another early local pastor, was chosen Corresponding Secretary.

Named to the Board of Directors were Samuel Wait, William Sanders, Elijah Clark and Samuel Simpson. Wait, also a New Bern pastor, was appointed General Agent at a monthly salary of \$35. Bearing all his own expenses, he traveled by horse and wagon all over the State in behalf of the denomination.

Wake Forest College was the idea of a Baptist who became pastor of the New Bern church. Wil-

liam Hooper, in August, 1832, presented to the convention a report recommending the "establishment of a Baptist Literary Institution in this State." On the committee to secure a president were Hooper, Meredith, Armstrong and Wait. The other three committee members selected Wait. Later Hooper served as president of the college. During 1834 Armstrong obtained \$17,000 in subscriptions for a new college dormitory.

Josiah J. Finch, pastor here from 1838 to 1844, was Corresponding Secretary of the State Convention for three years and Recording Secretary for four years. At one time he preached the opening convention sermon.

At first, church pews were rented. Prayer meetings were frequently held in private residences. The salary of the early pastors was about \$400 a year. Between pastorates a sermon was read Sunday mornings at the church. Neuse River shore was used until a church baptistry was built during the nineties.

Although only two members lived in town during Meredith's first pastorate, and only few others were in the neighboring territory, and there was not much wealth among the early congregations, the church grew steadily and fulfilled a high mission of religious and community service.

When the original house of worship became too small for the expanding congregation, it was decided to build a large, new, brick building. The old church and lot were sold to the Christian Church. This site is now owned and occupied by St. Cyprian's Colored Episcopal Church.

Title to the present lot on Middle Street was obtained in April 1845, upon payment of \$1,000, by deed from Dr. John R. Justice to the "Trustees of the Regular Baptist Church of New Bern:" James Riggs, Elijah Clark, James C. Stevenson, Jr., James M. C. Brinson, A. T. Jerkins, E. R. Stanly and Alexander Mitchell.

According to Col. John D. Whitford, later church historian, Mr. Clark knew that the members differed in their preferences for the new type of structure, so he went to New York by boat and obtained a plan from Thomas & Son, Baptist architects.

Strangely enough, the style of architecture followed is almost exactly like that of two Episcopal churches erected at about the same time: St. John's Church, built in Maury County, Tenn., by Bishop Leonidas Polk and his three brothers, 1839-41; and the Chapel of the Cross at Chapel Hill, N. C., which Bishop Joseph B. Cheshire said was erected, 1843-48, by John Henry Hopkins, Bishop of Vermont.

The attractive brick edifice here, still in use, was dedicated July 2, 1848, while the Rev. Martin Rudd Forey was pastor. It cost \$12,000. A large annex was built, and the interior of the main auditorium was modernized, at a cost of nearly \$10,000 during the first pastorate of the Rev. W. A. Ayers in the early part of the twentieth century. The present parsonage, bought for about \$3,000, was first occupied by the Rev. C. A. Jenkins.

The historic church structure has been used for many church and civic purposes. It was there that the noted orator, Edward Everett, delivered here

his famous address on George Washington in 1859. There the Baptist State Convention met in 1869.

Several members of the congregation organized the Tabernacle Baptist Church here during the last decade of the 19th century.

Thus serving many useful local ends and having a far-reaching influence through its pastors and leaders, the First Baptist Church and its congregations have a record second to none in North Carolina, serving as a stirring inspiration for all its modern members to strive for continued progress and service.

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Bible School 9:45 A.M.

Morning Worship 11:00 A.M.

Training Union—

October 1 — April 1 6:15 P.M.

April 1 — October 1 6:45 P.M.

Evening Worship—

October 1 — April 1 7:30 P.M.

April 1 — October 1 8:00 P.M.

Prayer Services—Wednesday

October 1 — April 1 7:30 P.M.

April 1 — October 1 8:00 P.M.



ORGANIZATION OFFICERS

NEEDHAM C. CROWE *Sunday School Supt.*

MURRY W. MUNNS *Training Union Director*

MRS. GEORGE V. McCOTTER *W.M.U. President*

J. WAYLAND SLEDGE *Brotherhood President*